

REMARKS

Claims 1-32 are pending and stand rejected as final. Claims 1, 15 and 32 have been amended. Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of the rejection in view of following remarks.

Applicant respectfully submits that the instant claim amendments add no new matter to the application, but rather are fully supported by the original specification. See, for example, page 5, lines 46-49.

The Request for Reconsideration filed on June 5, 2004, whose entry has now been requested, contained a Declaration of Inventor Ringeisen stating that gelling of the entire volume of polymer solution is an inherent feature of his class of gelling solvents. This Declaration also included a multimedia presentation comparing and contrasting the claimed invention with prior art precipitation-type gelations. The claims of the instant invention have now been amended to expressly recite this important feature.

The Prior Art Rejections

Claims 1-4, 8, 11-13, 15-17, 23-27, and 29-32 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by one or more of U.S. Patent No. 3,492,154 to Einstman (hereinafter referred to as "Einstman"), U.S. Patent No. 3,553,008 to Reischl et al. (hereinafter referred to as "Reischl"), or U.S. Patent No. 5,077,049 to Dunn et al. (hereinafter referred to as "Dunn"). Applicant respectfully traverses these rejections.

According to the invention as claimed, the second solvent, or "gelling solvent", causes the entire volume of polymer solution to gel. In sharp contrast, the prior art gelation techniques of the cited references are classic precipitations by a non-solvent. These non-solvents do not cause the gelation of the entire volume of solution, but instead cause the formation of two distinct phases. See, for example, column 5, lines 21-27 of Reischl, in which he states that dropwise addition of non-solvent to the polymer solution causes the formation of a "serum above or below a gelled, opaque, viscous and gel-like mass." Unlike the prior art gels based on precipitation, the gels of the instant inventive process are particularly significant because they can be injected into finely detailed molds without risk of clumping. See, for example, page 5, lines 4-5.

With specific regard to independent claim 1, applicant respectfully submits that none of the applied references disclose or suggest the claimed screening of liquids to *identify a solvent that does not dissolve, but merely swells the chosen polymer in solid form*. This is yet another reason why claim 1 and its dependents are patentable.

Accordingly, applicant respectfully requests that these rejections be withdrawn.

Claims 6, 7, 9, 11, 18-23 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Einstman in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,447,724 to Helmus and U.S. Patent No. 4,769,286 to LeNoane. Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection.

In response, applicant respectfully submits that none of these references, whether taken individually or in combination, discloses or suggests the claimed invention. Specifically, Einstman, like Reischl, describes a gelation that involves the separation of the solution into two separate phases: "By the term 'gel,' it is meant that the polymeric component partially separates from the solvent and non-solvent of the composition." Einstman, column 2, lines 11-14. Thus, Einstman is not gelling the entire volume of solution. Both Helmus and LeNoane fail to remedy this deficiency of Einstman. Accordingly, applicant respectfully requests that this rejection be withdrawn.

Claims 14 and 28 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Dunn in view of Reischl. Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection.

In response, applicant respectfully submits that neither Dunn nor Reischl, whether taken alone or in combination, discloses or suggests the claimed invention--that is, a gelling solvent that gels the entire volume of polymer solution rather than causing a precipitation event. Thus, this rejection should be withdrawn, applicant respectfully submits.

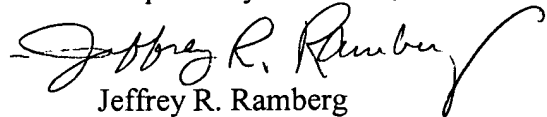
CONCLUSION

The claims as amended now recite expressly what was previously argued as being inherent--that the claimed invention features the second or gelling solvent gelling the entire volume of polymer solution. This is in sharp contrast to the previously known techniques for gelling polymer solutions.

In view of the amendments and the above remarks, applicant respectfully submits that the present application is in condition for allowance. Accordingly, applicant respectfully requests issuance of a Notice of Allowance directed to claims 1-32.

Should the Examiner deem that any further action on the part of applicant would be desirable, the Examiner is invited to telephone applicant's undersigned representative.

Respectfully submitted,


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